

# Project Backpack helps Hoosier foster children kick-off the school year in style

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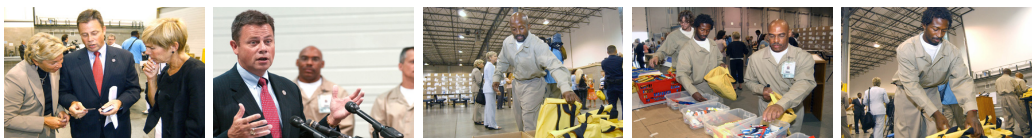
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J. David Donahue  
Commissioner



Indianapolis - A unique partnership between the Indiana Department of Correction (IDOC) and The Villages has resulted in the donation of hundreds of backpacks and thousands of dollars to help create

better learning opportunities for foster children who have suffered abuse and neglect.

During a month-long campaign, each of the Department of Correction's 28 correctional facilities hosted fundraisers, collecting school supplies and purchasing new backpacks to support this effort. Inmates and staff alike are committed to making Project Backpack a success. In 2005, when the program first started, IDOC raised \$6,400. This year, offenders and staff raised over \$22,000 - far exceeding the original goal. Project organizers are quick to point out that the money and donations are still coming in and expect them to throughout the next few weeks.

"I am so proud and excited about what our staff and offenders have accomplished through this year's Project Backpack," said J. David Donahue, Commissioner of the Indiana Department of Correction. "Everyone embraced this project unilaterally and has demonstrated a phenomenal commitment to The Villages and the children they serve."

Studies show that many children in foster care are often found to be a few years behind academically compared to their peers. Programs like Project Backpack help The Villages afford to send its foster children and youth off to school with the necessary supplies to help them succeed and to receive a positive educational experience.

"We are so privileged and blessed to be a partner with the Department of Correction on such an important project," said Sharon Pierce, President and CEO of The Villages. "This program is an amazing example of how caring individuals can help make a brighter future for children by making an investment. They are truly making a difference in the lives of our children."

The partnership between IDOC and The Villages, Indiana's largest nonprofit child and family service agency, may seem unusual to most. However, it is actually very natural as many children are admitted into the foster care system as a result of their parents' incarceration.

"We want to break the circle of challenges that our children are faced with," said Pierce. "Sending our children off to school with these supplies is a true gift and truly makes a difference in so many aspects of their daily lives. It demonstrates that the community cares about them and their future."

For more information on Project Backpack or the programs and services of The Villages, visit [www.villageskids.org](http://www.villageskids.org) or call 1-800-874-6880.

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**About The Villages**

The Villages is Indiana's largest nonprofit child and family services agency, with nearly 30 years of experience working throughout Indiana to ensure that children who have been abused, abandoned or neglected can be raised in a loving family setting. In addition to foster care and adoption, current services include: Healthy Families services, individual and group counseling, child care services, family preservation and reunification services, and independent and transitional living services.

### **About The Department of Correction**

The Department employs over 8,000 employees and houses 24,000 adult and juveniles in 32 facilities, ranging from minimum to maximum custody, prison camps, juvenile facilities and work release centers. The Department's home page on the Internet can be found at: <http://www.in.gov/indcorrection>. The Department's Re-entry Site can be found: <http://www.reentry.in.gov>.